

Message Text

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TAGS: PFOR, US, CE

SUBJECT:PM'S STATEMENT ON U.S. -SRI LANKA RELATIONS

REF: A) COLOMBO 4399 B) STATE 298126

1. SUMMARY: AT NOVEMBER 29 CEREMONY AT WHICH BICENTENNIAL
COMMEMORATIVE STAMP WAS ISSUED PRIME MINISTER BANDARANAIKE
AND POST AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS MINISTER KUMARASURIAR
REFERRED TO US-SRI LANKA RELATIONSHIP IN COMPLIMENTARY
TERMS. LATTER'S STRESS WAS ON ANTI-COLONIAL NATURE OF
REVOLUTION AND IDEALS FOR WHICH U.S. STANDS. END SUMMARY.

2. IN INFORMAL, OFF-THE-CUFF REMARKS AT THE CEREMONY
NOVEMBER 29 IN WHICH SHE ISSUED A BICENTENNIAL COMMEMORATIVE
STAMP, PRIME MINISTER SIRMAVO BANDARANAIKE,
SPEAKING IN SINHALA, BRIEFLY COMMENTED ON THE "COOPERATIVE"
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES. SHE MENTIONED
AMERICAN ECONOMIC AID AND THAT HAD BEEN GIVEN TO SRI LANKA AND
EXPRESSED HER HOPE THAT THE RESOURCES OF THE U.S.
WOULD CONTINUE TO BE USED FOR THE BENEFIT OF DEVELOPING
COUNTRIES. SHE ALSO SAID, ACCORDING TO THE PRESS REPORT,
THAT THE US WAS A POWERFUL NATION AND "THOUGH SRI LANKA
DIFFERED SOMETIMES FROM THE US OWING TO SRI LANKA'S
POLICY OF NON-ALIGNMENT, STILL THE TWO COUNTRIES PURSUED
THE SAME GOALS OF PEACE AND CO-EXISTENCE."

3. IN A LONGER AND OBVIOUSLY PREPARED SPEECH, MINISTER

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OF POSTS AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS C. KUMARASURIAR CONCENTRATED

ON THE ADMIRATION OF THE SRI LANKANS FOR THE ANTI-COLONIAL CHARACTER OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION. HE CALLED IT A MODEL FOR ALL COLONIAL WARS EVEN TODAY. IN A MUTED REFERENCE TO THE COMMUNIL DIFFICULTIES FACING HIS OWN TAMIL COMMUNITY IN SRI LANKA, KUMARASURIAR ALSO PRAISED THE SUCCESS OF THE U.S. IN FINDING "UNITY AMIDST DIVERSITY." CALLING THE U.S. THE "SUPREME CUTTING EDGE OF HUMAN CIVILIZATION EVERYWHERE" (AN ENGINEER, HE APPEARED TO REFER HERE PRIMARILY TO THE HIGH LEVEL OF TECHNOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT), HE SAID THAT "WE IN SRI LANKA CONSIDER OUR RELATIONSHIP, ALTHOUGH OUR TWO COUNTRIES DIFFER IN MANY WAYS, AS A VERY IMPORTANT LINK IN THE PURSUIT OF WORLD PEACE."

4. IN DECEMBER 1 EDITORIAL , ATHTHA, SINHALA NEWSPAPER PUBLISHED BY THE COMMUNIST PARTY/MOSCOW WING, WARNED THAT THE STAMP ISSUANCE SHOULD NOT BE TAKEN AS APPROVAL OF THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND GOVERNMENTAL SYSTEM OF THE U.S.

ALTHOUGH ATHTHA SAID THAT THERE WAS NO HARM IN SALUTING THE US INDEPENDENCE STRUGGLE, WHICH WAS LAUNCHED FOR A GREAT CAUSE AND WAS AN IMPORTANT EPOSIDE IN HISTORY, THE PAPER WENT ON TO SAY THAT THERE WAS A SUSPICION THAT THE OBJECT OF ISSUING THE STAMP WAS "TO PAY SPECIAL HOMAGE" TO THE U.S.

5. COMMENT: THE PAEAN OF PRAISE FROM THE PM AND KUMARASURIAR WAS WELCOME AND WAS WELL-PUBLICIZED BY THE LOCAL MEDIA. IT WAS A SIGNIFICANT GESTURE ON THE PART OF THE GSL TO ISSUE A COMMEMORATIVE STAMP, WHICH BOTH THE PM AND KUMARASURIAR STRESSED WAS THE FIRST EVER COMMEMORATING THE FOUNDING OF ANOTHER NATION. HOWEVER, TOO MUCH SHOULD NOT BE READ INTO THE ACT AS A POLITICAL GESTURE (DESPITE ATHTHA'S FEAR) BEYOND THE EXPRESSION OF AN HONEST ADMIRATION WHICH THE POLITICIANS OF THIS COUNTRY, OF ALL IDEOLOGICAL STRIPES, HAVE ALWAYS HAD FOR THE PRINCIPLES CONTAINED IN THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE AND THE CONSTITUTION. SRI LANKAN POLITICIANS FIND IT MORE PRUDENT TO PRIASE THE AMERICA OF TWO HUNDRED YEARS AGO THAN RISK THEIR NON-ALIGNED CREDENTIALS BY MORE CONTEMPORARY REFERENCES.
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